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## Only free media can help fight corruption

Speakers tell roundtable



Dr Salehuddin Ahmed speaks at a roundtable in the city yesterday. On his left are Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Denise Rollins and David A Pottebaum. Photo: STAR

Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday said the most important role the media plays is the watchdog role and so the journalists should be allowed to work without any political and economic pressure or harassment of any type.

It is important to ensure an environment where journalists can work freely, use their freedom shrewdly and do not face any control of the government or owners, they added.

Held at a city hotel, the roundtable titled 'The role of media in anti-corruption reform efforts' was the second event of the Anti-Corruption Week that kicked off in the city on Wednesday.

Promoting Governance, Accountability, Transparency and Integrity (PROGATI), a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), organised the week.

Speaking as the chief guest, Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad said corruption does not have a geographical boundary. It is now a global issue.

Apart from promoting good governance and rule of law, media plays a significant role in every national event and will be playing the same role in fighting corruption, he added.

The minister underscored the need for a concerted effort of the government, media and citizens to root out corruption.

Noted journalist Abed Khan said the media of the country from its beginning has been playing a positive role in curbing corruption that resulted in many positive changes in the political arena.

Apart from the electronic media, printing media is also evolving in the South Asia which is really incredible, he said, adding that but there are many impediments that hold back professionalism, including extremely limited rights of the journalists.

Journalism remains no longer journalism when the dream of media owners become the dream of the journalists or when the journalists become employees of the owners, he said, adding: "These are the darkest side of Bangladesh's journalism and soon it will take a terrifying turn if things are going on in this way."

Abed Khan went on saying: "Though it is a creative and sensitive profession, journalists are working amid fears of losing their jobs. Owners can remove anyone anytime if the their interests are not served."

"Both the print and electronic media are going through an extremely dark time," he said, adding that though the Right to Information Act (RTI) is on the cards, the authorities keep the right to suppress voice of the journalists.

"The only dream I dream is media is for the professional, of the professional and by the professional and only these media will play its proper role in curbing corruption," he said, adding, "Nothing will change unless we develop professionalism."

In his keynote paper, Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial Express, said free and responsible media can have a positive influence on any country on efforts, as part of winning public trust, to uproot and expose sources of corruption.

He further said that such media can perform two major roles -- being a watchdog over the government and educating people about how corruption and other related issues affect their lives.

Free, independent and responsible media can be a strong force along with other stakeholders to help build integrity into the rules of governance.

Human rights activist Dr Hameeda Hossain said Bangladesh has actually been in the forefront of news on corruption.

It is unfortunate that when the international organisation like Transparency International blames Bangladesh for very high level of corruption and the government, instead of taking that seriously as indicators of reform, laments them as blasphemy or conspiracy, she said.

Here media can play an important role in trying and influencing the government to act totally neutrally, she added.

A 'culture of secrecy' has been grown in the society, Hameeda said, stressing the need for immediate enactment of RTI.

Moderated by Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, pro-vice chancellor of Brac University, Denise Rollins, mission director of USAID, and David A Pottebaum, chief of party of PROGATI project, also spoke.